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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to improve parent participation in the educational process of 17 mildly disabled students in a rural secondary school by actively encouraging the parents to participate in academic conferences, special education reviews, and special education staffings. The major goal was to positively involve parents in the educational process of the 17 targeted students. The solutions applied to the problem consisted of holding informative workshops; scheduling and rescheduling parent-teacher conferences, staffings, and reviews at the convenience of parents; and offering parents transportation to scheduled events. The solutions were implemented over a 12-week period. Specific objectives called for at least 12 parents to attend each of six scheduled events; however, the objective was met for only two events. Nevertheless, the participating parents were willing to become positively involved with their childrens' education. The outcomes suggest that, given specific direction and help, parents will show an increase in their participation. These solution strategies may be used as a foundation for building a positive parent-school relationship program in any secondary school. (Author/TD)

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ED 401 061

Improving Parent Participation in the Educational Process of 17 Secondary Students Who are Mildly Disabled and Exhibiting At-Risk Behaviors in a Rural District Setting

by
Janet E. Miller
Cluster 69

A Practicum Report Presented to
the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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APPROVAL PAGE

This practicum took place as described.

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This practicum report was submitted by Janet E. Miller under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

1/9/96
Date of Final Approval of Report

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Abstract

Improving Parent Participation in the Educational Process of 17 Secondary Students Who are Mildly Disabled and Exhibiting At-Risk Behaviors in a Rural District Setting. Miller, Janet E., 1995: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. High School/Secondary Education/Junior High School/Special Education/Parent Participation/Special Needs Students/Parent Teacher Cooperation/Parent School Relationship/Parent Workshops/Parent Teacher Conferences

This practicum was designed to improve parent participation in the educational process of 17 secondary students who are mildly disabled by actively encouraging the parents to participate in academic conferences, special education reviews, and special education staffings. The major goal was to positively involve parents in the educational process of the 17 targeted students.

The solutions applied to the problem consisted of holding informative workshops and scheduling and rescheduling parent-teacher conferences, staffings, and reviews at the convenience of parents. The solutions were implemented over a 12-week period.

The writer's findings support the hypothesis that parents are willing to become positively involved with their student's education. When given specific direction and help, parents will show an increase in their participation. The writer proposes that the solution strategies used can be a foundation for building a positive parent school relationship program in any secondary school.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Description of Community

The writer's high school is one of three rural schools in a public school district. This school is located geographically at a point where three counties connect. Uniquely, students from all three counties attend the writer's school. The writer's school is located in the county where most of the school's population lives. Other students in the county attend school in two larger districts.

The town, according to1994 county statistics, had a population of 2,300 citizens and was once referred to as a mill town because its major support came from a large and thriving textile factory. The factory has been closed for more than a decade, but the town is still struggling for financial stability. There are several small industries in the town, but the school is the town's largest employer. Unfortunately, the number of single parent homes in the area stands at 64% and the overall poverty level is reported at 15%. These statistics are not helpful in promoting growth in the town and school.

Description of Work Setting

The mission of the writer's high school is "... to promote high learning standards, cultivate pride in workmanship among students and staff, provide relevant, hands-on learning experiences, and to prepare students for future technologies". The vision of the school is that students "... will become more actively involved in learning" while the system continually modifies itself to ensure development and enhancement of students' creativity and talents. The district motto is "Where Excellence Is A Direction, Not A Place".

The writer's school served 515 students in grades seven through twelve for the 1993-1994 school year. The minority student population was 21%. A staff of 37 professionals included a full time mental health counselor, one full time guidance counselor, one part-time guidance counselor, one part-time psychiatrist, and one part-time psychologist. The 11 paraprofessionals included aides, clerks, and secretaries. The writer was the only black professional employed at the high school for the 1993-1994 school year. The percentage of students on free lunch was 31% and reduced lunch was 8%. The writer's school had a 6% drop-out rate which was higher than the state and county averages.

Writer's Role

The writer has a bachelors degree in psychology and a masters degree in elementary education with emphasis in special education. The writer also has certifications and experience in the areas of the educable mentally disabled and the learning disabled at the secondary level. The writer teaches the learning disabled and the educable mentally disabled at the secondary level in a resource setting. For one period a day, the writer also teaches a Teacher Cadet class of 11th and 12th grade honor students who are interested in pursuing a career in the teaching profession. Being a secondary special education educator for 19 years, this writer has made an effort to remain in touch with the general population of the high school by sponsoring various clubs, maintaining membership in school and community teams, and being active on committees. The writer is now involved with the Discipline Team Committee which searches for ways to help students become more successful in school.

Chapter II: Study of the Program

Problem Statement

The problem to be solved in this practicum was that parents of 17 secondary students who are mildly disabled were not positively involved in the educational process of their children. These parents should be involved in this process by participating actively in the academic and discipline conferences, special education reviews and staffings, or athletic events of their children.

Problem Description

The writer found that parents of 17 students who are mildly disabled were not positively involved in their children's educational process. In this practicum, the term "parent" was defined as the natural mother or father, adoptive mother or father, legal guardian, grandmother or grandfather, adult sibling, aunt or uncle, or adult representative designated by the legal guardian. Teachers reported that parents of these students did not request conferences when their children showed signs of failure or frustration in the classrooms. Administrators reported that these same parents were more likely to attend discipline conferences if the requests were coupled with the stipulation that students could not return to classes until a specified period had transpired or unless accompanied to school by a parent.

Many of these students expressed hopelessness at the possibility of passing their classes after making very low marks for an extended time. In addition, several of these students exceeded the limits for the attendance requirements after violating the school rules and being suspended several times. With a combination of low grades and poor attendance, these students were decreasing their chances for being successful.

In addition, parents of children with special needs did not attend annual reviews and staffings to exercise their rights and to ensure that their children's rights were being protected. Records further showed that parents of these children who are mildly disabled did not attend Parent/Teacher Conference Day, teacher requested academic conferences, or athletic events. In contrast, many parents had attended discipline conferences at the request of the school officials.

The trend seemed to be that parents participated in conferences only when they were forced to be in attendance. The targeted students did not see their parents visiting the school or talking with school personnel in a pleasant or social atmosphere. Apparently, the parents did not view the school in partnership with them, nor did the parents feel welcome to visit the school or attend functions involving their child. Unfortunately, the school did not have a specific plan to help make parents feel welcome and in partnership.

Problem Documentation

During the first quarter of the school year, the regular teachers of the 17 students who were served by the writer, expressed concern about the parents not making contact at the beginning of the school year. During an informal survey the writer found that 21 of 37 professionals on staff were concerned with what appeared to be parental indifference. Shortly thereafter, the writer conducted an informal survey with the three administrators. The consensus was that several of the 17 targeted students were in non-compliance with school regulations to the point that their parents had already been called in for conferences. After receiving this information, the writer decided that further investigation was warranted to ascertain whether a problem existed with parents and to what extent.

Upon reviewing the records, the writer found that 10 of 17 parents of these students did not attend staffings and annual reviews concerning their child with special needs. The writer conducted a parent survey and found the following results: 13 of 17 parents did not attend teacher requested conferences concerning academic problems, 15

of 17 parents did not attend an athletic event. 10 of 17 parents did not attend Parent/Teacher Conference Day. However, on the other hand, 10 of 17 parents did attend discipline conferences.

Causative Analysis

The writer found several relevant and contributing causes to low parental involvement. Specific information concerning each of the targeted students was gathered through interviews with the students and the parents. Additional information was revealed by reviewing the personal histories that must be completed for each student with special needs. First, targeted students living in single parent homes, homes with step-parents, or with extended family members were a determining factor in parental involvement. Second, students living with parents who did not receive a high school diploma or its equivalent was another relevant cause for this problem. An additional contributing factor was the impact of teenage motherhood. A fourth factor involved the difficulty of contacting the teacher (writer) of the students in the evening after regular school hours. The writer lived outside of the local calling area and parents would have had to make long distance calls to contact the writer at home. The last relevant cause was that the writer had no formal training in establishing parent-teacher relationships.

First, children living in single parents homes, homes with step-parents or with extended family members was a prevalent situation with these targeted students. Parents who were single had to prioritize their time because of jobs outside of the home, daily household duties, other children, conflicting time schedules, and various other obligations. According to seven of these students that lived in homes where parents had remarried, the parent appeared more concerned with the success of the marriage than the educational success of the child. Several students had expressed to the writer that their parents could not attend school meetings during the day because of work schedules and were unable to attend school meetings or functions after work because of household responsibilities. One of the 17 students lived with an elderly grandmother, who seemed to

make every effort to care for the three abandoned grandchildren. This seventh grade student reported that two of the three children were exhibiting at-risk behaviors such as smoking, drinking, and sexual promiscuity. The oldest child married as a young teenager and now had a family of her own which often required the baby-sitting services of the grandmother. All in all the responsibilities, declining health, and age seemed to be affecting the parental participation of the grandmother.

Another cause that contributed to this problem was the educational levels of the parents. Eight of the students lived in homes where parents had not received a high school diploma or its equivalency. These parents agreed that life was difficult without a diploma and expressed to the writer a desire for their children to complete the high school program for diplomacy. Unfortunately, these parents seemed unable to adequately help or encourage their children toward this goal. The parents' hesitancy to participate in their child's education suggested to some students that education was not important. In conversations concerning job hunting without a high school diploma, the response from the students was, "My mama (daddy) don't have no high school diploma and she (he) got a job."

A third contributing factor that was causing inadequate parent participation was the incidence of children born to teenaged-mothers. Thirteen of these students who are mildly disabled were born to teenaged-mothers. According to one student, one mother was 14 when she became pregnant. This resulted in her dropping out of school and getting married. An early pregnancy can be the stimulus for dropping out of school, poverty levels, failed or stressful marriages, and abusive situations in the home. Sometimes teenagers are not physically or mentally prepared for early pregnancies. In addition, many do not appear to have appropriate parenting skills.

Because the writer lived outside of the local calling area, this could have been a relevant factor for low parental participation. The majority of the parents of the targeted students who work were on the day shift. These same hours were observed by the school

system. Several of the students did not have phones in their homes, so calling from home was not an option. According to the students, their parents could not risk being off work or using the company's phone unless it was "important."

Last, but not necessarily the least important, was the fact that the writer had no formal training in establishing parent-teacher relationships. Through research, the writer discovered that there were definite guidelines and considerations to involving parents in the education of their children. Ignorance of these guidelines could have damaged what may have been a very positive and rewarding parent-teacher relationship.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Inadequate parental participation was the problem addressed by this practicum. Educator's requests for help to establish programs for parental involvement in schools across America are an indication that they are seriously interested in increasing parental participation (Fredericks & Rasinski, 1990). Also according to these authors, educators are not only investigating, but have a desire for "... creating and maintaining partnerships between educators and parents" (p. 76). Moore (1991) was in agreement and stated that the most important component of a parent involvement program is the "... partnership between parents and school: an understanding that it takes both to achieve positive outcomes for children" (p. 17). Roesener (1995) cited that studies support a direct relationship between parents being involved in their child's education and the overall success of the child. Even the federal government stipulated that planning and funding for parental participation in programs be "...consistent with presumed positive benefits and legislature mandates..." (Cone, Delawyer, & Wolfe, 1985, p. 418). However, according to Katsiyannis and Ward (1992) "... results of parent surveys indicated that 20% of the parents did not participate in the development of their child's Individualized Education Program, though it is the guiding document in educating a child with a disability" (p. 54).

In a study involving students with mild disabilities, parental involvement, and transitional services, Benz and Halpern (1987) found that the active participation of the

parent was critical to the positive transition outcomes. The authors made this statement for the following three reasons: "...parents have enormous impact upon the direction of their child's future through the values they hold for him or her, aside from the child are the only constant in the transition process, and along with their children have the most to gain or lose in the transition process" (p. 512).

Heller (1992) stated that an important component of an "effective school" is "school-community relationships" and administrators should invest more time and effort into this area of school planning (p. 12). Heller further stipulated that if administrators would commit the time required for better plans and utilize available and appropriate personnel, their school would reap "... positive, product results" (p. 13). Vandegrift and Greene (1992) agreed that increasing the levels of parent participation is a goal that should be worked on eventually, but educators should first recognize " ... that it is impossible to solicit involvement from parents who are worried about their own survival" (p. 59). According to Moore (1991), the realization and efforts to revolutionize the idea and implementation of parent involvement in the schools is welcomed. However, this author saw several barriers to the success of any such program and suggested that these barriers be " ... removed before parents can be meaningfully included" in the child's school (p. 19). In part, these barriers included remediating the " ... distance between teachers and parents, lack of teacher training, views of parental involvement, and perception of the school" (pp. 19-20). Healey (1994) agreed that schools must go further than just involving parents in activities. Healey felt that " ... we must give them opportunities to experience the curriculum" (p. 31). Doing this would ensure better cooperation and understanding from the parents.

With the many growing needs that schools are faced with in serving their students and parents, frustration is causing some administrators to be reactive rather than proactive. Some schools, according to Pardini (1995), in desperation, are resorting to punitive techniques toward the parents to increase involvement. Pardini explained that

students are committing school crimes such as being discipline problems and breaking attendance rules. However it is the parents who are being forced to pay the fines, attend school with their children, or perform duties or jobs at the school. Schools are trying this strategy in an effort to enlist parents' help in positively effecting the behavior of these children.

Roesener (1995) related that some parents do not come to school because they feel the school blames them for their children's " ... academic weaknesses and inappropriate behavior" (p. 30). According to Finders and Lewis (1994), "parents who have dropped out of school do not feel confident in school settings" (p. 51). Additionally, Rosow (1991) shared that "those who are rich in literacy fortify their children" and those that are not " ... perpetuate illiteracy from generation to generation" (p. 42). In a study conducted by Leyser (1985) and related by Katsiyannis and Ward (1992), "parents indicated that low record of attendance to Individualized Education Programs meetings was the result of scheduling, transportation, and past negative experiences with school meetings" (p. 51).

There are many causes for inadequate parental participation. Educators are aware of and are seeking to combat this problem. Whether problems experienced by students are academic or non-academic, schools appear to agree that participation from the parents will result in greater success for the students.

Chapter III: Anticipated Outcomes and Evaluation Instruments

Goals and Expectations

The goal of the practicum was that parents of targeted secondary students who are mildly disabled would accept a positive role in the educational process of their children.

Expected Outcomes

The following outcomes were projected for this practicum:

Outcome 1: Twelve of 17 parents will attend Parent-Teacher Conferences to discuss the progress of the child.

Outcome 2: Twelve of 17 parents will attend a workshop, composed of a formal and informal forum, designed to inform parents of services offered by appropriate agencies.

Outcome 3: Twelve of 17 parents will attend an evening or night workshop designed to inform them of the special education curriculum and to discuss the requirements for being successful at the secondary level.

Outcome 4: Twelve of 17 parents will attend a hot-dog supper to socialize and become familiar with the teachers in a positive atmosphere.

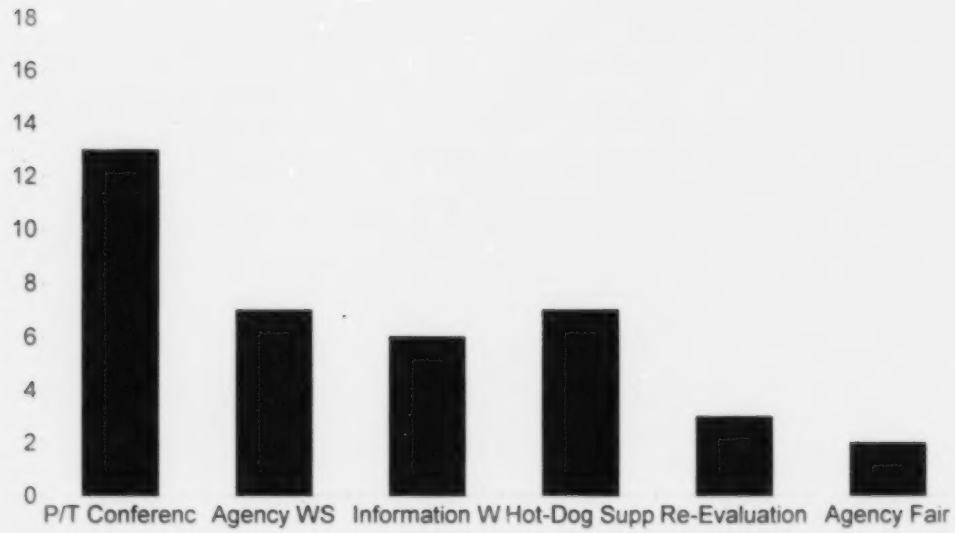
Outcome 5: Three of 17 parents who have children scheduled for annual re-evaluation during this practicum period will attend and participate in the Individualized Education Program.

Outcome 6: Twelve of 17 parents will attend an "Agency Fair" where representatives will either be in attendance or send pre-packaged materials that can help parents in choosing the right agency for more specific help.

Measurement of Outcomes

The parent signed a sheet indicating their attendance at each function. This method was chosen so that a record of attendance could be compiled for each outcome. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1. Event Totals-Parent Attendance



Additionally, a checklist was used as an evaluation tool to measure each outcome. The checklist was chosen by the writer for its ease and quickness to complete. The writer felt that the parents would be more apt to complete and return a form such as a checklist. Each checklist was a direct reflection of the agenda planned to meet each outcome. (See Appendices A through E.)

To assess Outcome 5, participating parents signed the IEP and not a sign-in sheet. This method was chosen because it is a required action by law. A parent's signature is proof that the parent has attended and is in agreement with the school concerning the

proposed plan for the child. Since parents must sign the IEP, the signature served as tangible evidence for this outcome.

The writer considered each of the six outcomes to be successfully met if the specified number of parents attended each specific function. The writer would use each checklist to upgrade the quality and relevance of each succeeding function.

Chapter IV: Solution Strategy

Statement of Problem

The problem to be solved in this practicum was that parents of 17 secondary students who are mildly disabled were not positively involved in the educational process of their children. These parents should be involved in this process by participating actively in the academic and discipline conferences, special education reviews and staffings, or athletic events of their children.

Discussion

The literature reviewed supported the need for parental participation in the schools. Vandegrift and Greene (1992) suggested that one way of fostering parent involvement and fulfilling their need is by " ... meeting parents where they are" (p. 59). Further, according to Fredericks and Rasinski (1990), in order to ensure that parents become involved and stay involved, a program of five basic criteria must be enacted. These criteria included (a) completing a needs assessment program of parents, (b) sharing responsibility with parents, (c) getting parents actively involved with decision making, (d) constant communication between the school and parents should be a priority, and (e) continuous participation should be a long term goal.

Moore (1991) proposed that parents who are exhibiting at-risk behaviors themselves need strategies created to first help them before becoming involved in their child's education. This author suggested that schools " ... create alternative strategies and different levels of resources to recruit and meet the needs of parents with more serious problems" (p. 17). When this approach is followed, major barriers to parental participation such as "lack of teacher training, community's perception of the school, and

the school's limited view of parental involvement" can be confronted and eliminated (pp. 17, 19).

Roesener (1995) advised schools to involve parents to the point that they appeared "... helpful rather than a hindrance" (p. 30). Parents and teachers should work together to solve problems when they arise. Roesener revealed that a school with an "open-door policy" would increase the incidence of volunteering and visiting within the school (p. 31). Therefore, parent involvement that collaborates with the efforts of the school helps students become more successful. When students see parents taking such an active role in their education, Nuckolls (1991) reported that " ... the rewards are immeasurable" (p. 45). This author further stated that "...the simplistic principle is that children model and value what they experience in their homes" (p. 45).

According to Finders and Lewis (1994), parents felt that schools should get them involved by " ...developing their trust" (p. 53). The authors reported that these parents felt that when an easy rapport was established between parent and teacher, the parent was comfortable and more likely to work with that teacher. Finders and Lewis recommended that schools be more aware of the messages that they " ...convey through dress, gestures, and talk" (p. 53). Parents also suggested that " ...schools clarify just how parents can help in their child's schooling, encourage parents to be assertive, build on home experiences, and use parent expertise" (pp. 52-53).

Holbrook (1985) noted that schools should use parent-teacher conferences to advise parents on how they can help their children in a " ... direct and unique..." way (p. 898). Holbrook reported that from a study that surveyed teachers and was conducted by Pearson (1981), " ...preplanning will ensure a successful conference" and teachers "...offering several activities based on a single suggestion allows the parents freedom and creativity in working with the child" (p. 898). Lenihan and Duquin (1991) suggested parent meetings begin " ...with the premise that the students are good kids who are not doing their work, and recognize that parents and teachers like the students but do not like

what the students are doing" (p. 16). The authors contended that if this approach was followed desirable goals could be reached without losing the cooperation of the student or parent.

Healey (1994) supported this same communication theme with parents but offered additional guidelines to hosting an effective parent workshop. Healey suggested giving parents plenty of notice, specific beginning and ending times, baby-sitting services, appropriate speakers and format, question and answer period, videotapes, and evaluation for feedback and opinions. Healey also promoted guidelines for newsletters, either weekly or monthly, to discuss " ...relevant topics and happenings" (p. 30). Katsiyannis and Ward (1992) indicated that " ...local officials may need to reach out through phone calls and other nontraditional methods to foster parent involvement" (p. 54). While parents still choose whether or not to participate, these authors stressed that efforts must be made to win the parents' participation.

Luis (1992) offered that "much as traditional classroom instruction does not wash with very diverse urban adolescents, neither does a school's ordinary ways of relating to families" (p. 10). This author shared a study's findings conducted by Epstein and others. The report stated that " ...disadvantaged schools are less likely to recruit and train parents to work as volunteers, offer parent workshops, communicate frequently with parents on how to help their children with homework and skills, and have an active PTA" (p. 10). Schurr (1992) submitted that "educators can no longer rely on their stereotypic views of what the family represents and how its needs can be addressed" (p. 3). One indication that parents were trying to break away from the traditional approach, according to Pardini (1995), was that parents of " ...consistent disciplinary problems" were choosing to attend school with their children rather than have them suspended (p. 31). According to Lovelady (1992), "it is a fallacy that all parents do not want to participate in their children's education" (p. 56). This author proposed that parents wait for the schools to "

...initiate programs to help the parents improve their skills" so they can participate in their children's education (p. 56).

After reviewing the literature, the writer found that educators as well as parents felt parental involvement was essential if students were to become successful. Moore (1991) believed that schools must be willing to seek out and try different approaches to meeting the challenge of parent participation. According to Finders and Lewis (1994), schools should work to create a trusting and caring attitude and environment that will comfort and reassure parents. Fredericks and Rasinski (1990) contended that schools should communicate with the parents and set mutual goals toward accomplishing positive parent participation.

Schurr (1992) advised that educators should realize that family structures have changed greatly in recent years and preconceived ideas about families and family structures must change. According to Roesener (1995), educators should accept and respect parents in a way that parents and students feel validated. Instead of exhibiting blaming attitudes and techniques toward parents for their children's behavior, Pardini (1995) recommended that educators should create partnerships with parents in an effort to help the students display more acceptable behaviors.

The underlying theme in the recommendations from the literature all involved communicating with parents, creating partnerships between the schools and parents, and enabling parents to meet the needs of their children. After reflection upon these solutions, the writer felt that every educator should incorporate these points into their daily vocations. The solutions seemed worthy, sound, and had the best interest of the students in mind. The time required to meet the goals would be well worth the effort if students and parents noticed a change in the school's environment. Extra material and money needed would be minimal. These solutions can be incorporated into any school if only a concerted effort is made.

Descriptions of Selected Solutions

After careful analysis and evaluation of the generated ideas, the writer chose a combination of ideas that would be most practical when used with the rural population and in the work setting of the writer. The solutions of offering specific and helpful suggestions at parent-teacher conferences to parents, rescheduling conferences at the convenience of parents, and offering transportation to parents to attend scheduled staffings and annual reviews seemed to be practical choices to reach the goal of involving parents. In addition, the writer felt conducting workshops to inform parents of school related issues and local agency services, and a hot-dog supper to get acquainted in a positive atmosphere were also appropriate to increasing parental participation.

The solutions were also chosen because they could be implemented within the three month practicum period. Representatives were invited from local agencies to participate in the Agency Fair event. Administrators and colleagues were encouraged to participate throughout the practicum. The writer served as the major facilitator for each event.

Report of Action Taken

Participants during the 12-week implementation period included the17 targeted secondary students who are mildly disabled and their parents. Additionally, the practicum involved the teachers of the students, the attendance secretary, the building administrators, a community volunteer, and selected agency representatives.

Prior to week one of implementation, a copy of the completed proposal was submitted to the district superintendent. This copy was returned to the writer approved for implementation. The superintendent requested to be informed of problems, progress, and results of the practicum.

During week one of the implementation period, the writer submitted the plans for the practicum to the necessary supervisors. Discussions concerning the details of

implementation procedures and funding requirements took place between the principal, the assistant principals, and the special education coordinator during this week.

The writer held meetings to discuss the practicum goals with each student's teacher. Their input and participation was encouraged and welcomed. At this time the first event, the hot-dog supper, was discussed in detail. A convenient day and time was also set for this get-acquainted social. Additionally, the writer began working on the agency lists handout for distribution to the parents during Parent/Teacher Conference Day.

During week two, the writer discussed the get-acquainted social with the students. All the students were encouraged to attend. At this time invitations were sent to the parents for the event.

Week three consisted of the get-acquainted social being held. The writer continued working on the agency listing to be distributed to the parents at a later time. Work also began on concrete plans for a workshop to inform parents of the secondary special education curriculum. The workshop would also include specific suggestions to help students be successful at the secondary level.

During implementation weeks 4, 5, 6, and 7, the agency listings that would be distributed at the Parent/Teacher Conference Day and the workshop plans for school information were completed. The writer discussed the purpose of the workshop with the students and sent the invitations to the parents. Specific support from the faculty and administration was encouraged. The night workshop for the parents was held. The writer prepared the specific academic and behavioral goal suggestions agenda to be offered at the Parent/Teacher Conference Day. Discussions as to the purposes of the Parent/Teacher Conference Day agenda were held with the students. Conference confirmations were requested from the parents. The writer also began the preliminary plans to prepare for the agency fair.

Weeks 8, 9, and 10 consisted of the Parent/Teacher Conference Day event being held. In addition to the in-house requirements, the academic and behavioral goals were discussed with the parents. The writer distributed the agency listings and requested feedback from the parents.

After reviewing the feedback from the parents, the writer concluded that it would be impractical to hold an agency fair event and an agency workshop as previously planned. From the discussions that had taken place on Parent/Teacher Conference Day only two parents had expressed an interest in receiving help from community agencies. The writer made contact with these agencies by inviting representatives, requesting brochures, and relating any specific requests for information for the parents. The writer decided that the parents who had expressed an interest would be invited at the specified time to a less formal agency fair. However, all other parents would be welcomed. Although the writer consolidated Outcome 2 and Outcome 6, individual records were kept because of prior indications from parents.

Contact with parents who did not attend the scheduled Parent/Teacher Conference Day was made by the writer. Rescheduling and makeup conferences began. Free transportation to and from the meetings was offered to parents. Times for the conferences were open for negotiation between the parent and the writer with as much latitude as possible. The writer continued working on the agency fair event for interested parents by holding discussions with supervisors, faculty, and students. Notices were sent to parents as to the date and time of the event.

During weeks 11 and 12 of the practicum implementation, the event was publicized and parents were personally reminded of the upcoming agency event. The writer coordinated the agenda submitted by the agency representatives and collected and organized the material that was to be distributed at the event. The event was held.

At the end of the practicum period, the writer discussed with the students' their future plans and goals. Additionally, the writer continued planning for the increased involvement of parents in their child's education.

Chapter V: Results

Results

The writer found that parents of 17 secondary students who are mildly disabled were not positively involved in the educational process of their children. These parents were not actively participating in academic and discipline conferences, special education reviews and staffings, or athletic events of the 17 targeted students.

The solution strategy chosen was implemented over a 12-week period. The strategy consisted of offering specific and helpful suggestions at parent/teacher conferences, rescheduling conferences at the convenience of parents, and offering transportation to parents to attend scheduled staffings and annual reviews. Additionally, the strategy included the writer conducting relevant workshops and hosting a get-acquainted social. The goal of the practicum was to positively involve the parents in the educational process of the 17 targeted students.

The following outcomes were projected for this practicum:

Outcome 1: Twelve of 17 parents will attend Parent-Teacher Conferences to discuss the progress of the child.

This outcome was met.

Thirteen of the 17 parents attended a parent-teacher conference. Nine participating parents signed a sheet that indicated their attendance on Parent /Teacher Conference Day. Four additional parent-teacher conferences were held at a later date. A checklist was used as an evaluation tool to measure the effectiveness of this outcome.

Outcome 2: Twelve of 17 parents will attend a workshop, composed of a formal and informal forum, designed to inform parents of services offered by appropriate agencies.

This outcome was not met.

Seven parents signed a sheet indicating their presence at this agency workshop. A checklist was used to evaluate the quality of the event.

Outcome 3: Twelve of 17 parents will attend an evening or night workshop designed to inform them of the special education curriculum and to discuss the requirements for being successful at the secondary level.

This outcome was not met.

Six parents signed the sign-in sheet indicating their presence at this event. At the encouragement of the writer, four students accompanied their parents.

Outcome 4: Twelve of 17 parents will attend a hot-dog supper to socialize and become familiar with the teachers in a positive atmosphere.

This outcome was not met.

Seven parents signed the sign-in sheet indicating their presence at this event. A checklist was used as an evaluation tool to measure this outcome.

Outcome 5: Three of 17 parents who have children scheduled for annual re-evaluation during this practicum period will attend and participate in the Individualized Education Program.

This outcome was met.

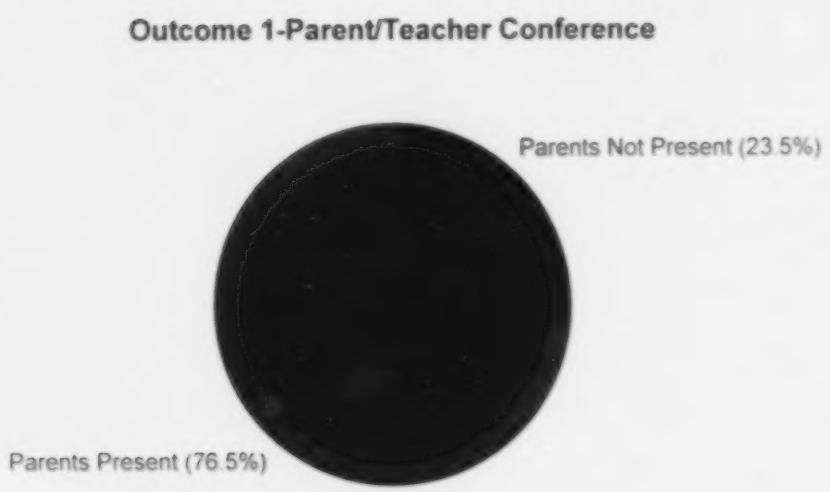
Although only three re-evaluations were projected to take place during this period, a transfer student was acquired and a re-evaluation was previously scheduled. Of the four re-evaluations held during this implementation period, three parents actively participated in the re-evaluation proceedings.

Outcome 6: Twelve of 17 parents will attend an "Agency Fair" where representatives will either be in attendance or send pre-packaged materials that can help parents in choosing the right agency for more specific help.

This outcome was not met.

Two participating parents signed the sign-in sheet indicating their presence. (See Figure 2 for visual of individual outcomes.)

Figure 2. Visuals for Individual Outcomes 1 - 6



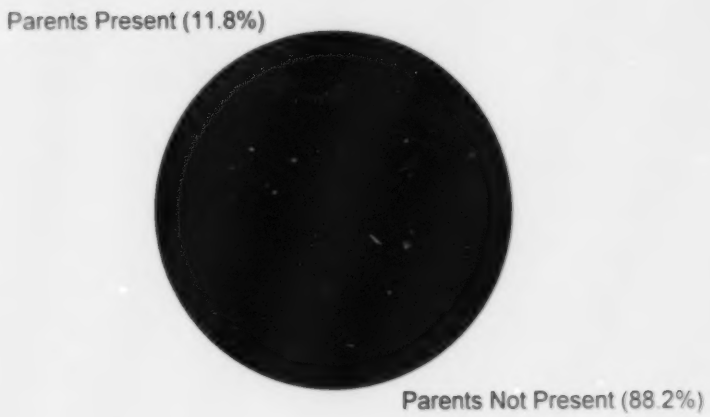
Outcome 2-Agency Workshop

Outcome 3-Information Workshop

Outcome 4-Hot-Dog Supper

Outcome 5-Re-Evaluations

Outcome 6-Agency Fair



Discussion

Of the six projected outcomes for this practicum, only two of the objectives were met. The writer originally proposed that the outcomes be considered successful if the numbers attending each event met a certain standard. No provisions were made for increased participation in the educational process of the targeted children. However, when the goal of the practicum was reviewed, positive progress was noted.

In outcome one, the objective was met. Thirteen of 17 parents conferred with the teacher concerning progress made or projected goals for their student. Additionally, outcome five was successful in that three of 17 parents actively participated in the re-evaluation process of their child. The numbers say that these outcomes were successful, but more important than numbers, the writer felt that parents were comfortable during the conversations. The parents offered suggestions and asked for advice in seeking ways to help their children.

For outcomes two and six, success was not experienced. The parents felt there was little or no need for the writer to help them solicit aid from neighboring agencies. The writer, in retrospect, felt that the guidance counselor would perhaps have a greater response in this area than a classroom teacher. Also the writer acknowledged that the

work setting had a mental health specialist on the site, a part-time child psychologist available, two guidance counselors, access to vocational rehabilitators and facilities, and access to drug and alcohol counseling. The need for community agency help could be supplied through either one or a combination of any of the aforementioned service representatives.

When considering the results of outcome three and four, the projected objectives were not met. However, there were unexpected successes related to these outcomes. The administrators of the writer's work setting adapted the get-acquainted social for the entire high school. All the parents of the students were invited and the entire faculty was in attendance. The event was considered successful by the number of parents in attendance. The administration has considered making this an annual event.

Outcome three's information workshop did not boast high numbers, but it apparently generated a wealth of positive relations throughout the community. Seven first-time secondary special education recipients have been staffed since the information workshop was held. This has been unprecedented in this writer's 20 years as a secondary special education teacher.

In analyzing the results of this practicum, the writer felt that the findings supported the current research concerning parent participation in the schools. The literature suggested that there should be ongoing communication with parents, partnerships must be created between the schools and parents, and schools must help parents meet the needs of their children. Whether the increased participation over a period of time will be sustained is still a matter to be seen. However, the writer believed that the solution stategies proposed in this practicum were sound and well worth the investment in building relations with parents. The writer also felt that a program such as this, if planned and followed over a period of time, will make a solid foundation on which to build parent participation.

Recommendations

The following recommendations can be used in the writer's work setting as a result of completing this practicum. They are:

1. There should be on-site workshops that suggest specific ways to help teachers to encourage parents to become more involved in their child's educational process. Schools should not assume that teachers and parents are aware of this information and leave to chance this vital aspect that could enable the child to become more successful.

2. Teachers should prepare and discuss relevant and concrete suggestions with parents during conferences as well as soliciting and welcoming any information from parents concerning their children. Parents are the authorities in knowing their children and might offer information that could prove invaluable to the teacher.

3. Parents should be given oral and in-depth explanations about programs and offered oppportunities to inquire and suggest ways to improve existing programs. Although the special education department has been in existence for many years in our school system, there have been many changes in our approach and our procedures. Schools should not assume that parents understand the premise, the procedure, or the goals of a program after being given a brief introduction, explanation, or written information.

Dissemination

The practicum results will be disseminated throughout the writer's work setting by sharing the information with the teachers, administrators, and parents who were involved in the project. A teacher who was not involved in the project has requested that the writer share the information with the alternative approach investigative team at the writer's work site in an upcoming inservice program. A copy of the approved practicum will be forwarded to the writer's superintendent and special education program coordinator. The results will also be shared at the writer's district special education departmental meetings.

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Appendix A

Parent/Teacher Conference Checklist

Parent/Teacher Conference

Discussed Satisfactorily? Yes No

1. Attendance _____
2. Class Rules _____
3. School Rules _____
4. Difficulties Noted By Teacher _____
5. Difficulties Noted By Parent _____
6. Specific Strengths _____
7. Specific Weaknesses _____
8. Goals Of Student _____
9. Goals Of Parents _____
10. Goals Of School/Teacher _____
11. Suggestions From Parents _____
12. Suggestions From Student _____
13. Suggestions From School/Teacher _____
14. Academic Progress _____
15. Behavioral Progress _____
16. Prepared Handout On Agencies _____

Appendix B

Agency Workshop

Agency Workshop

Please answer the following questions. Your answers will help me to better serve you in the future.

Yes No

1. Did you receive an agency listing with service descriptions?

2. Did you have the opportunity to have your opinions considered in composition of this handout?

3. Is the handout useful for your needs?

4. Did you like the way the information was presented by the speaker, in the small groups, and by receiving the written information?

5. Would you like to have another event such as this one?

Appendix C

School Information Workshop

School Information Workshop

The following topics will be discussed to familiarize you with our program. We will have a question and answer period at the end or you may place a check ( ) by any topic that you feel you need more information on. The teacher will provide this information individually and privately at a later time if you sign the sheet and leave it with her.

1. Individualized Education Plans (IEP's)
   a. What are they?
   b. How are they formed?
   c. How can they be changed?
   d. Who uses them?

2. Rights
   a. Parents
   b. Students

3. Attendance Laws
   a. Legal excuses
   b. Time limits

4. Academic Alternatives
   a. Regular (High School Diploma)
   b. Vocational choices
   c. Transitional services

5. Discipline
   a. Rules (class, school, bus)
   b. Suspensions

6. Contact
   a. Who?
   b. When?
   c. How?

Appendix D

Hot-dog Supper

Hot-dog Supper

Please help me by answering the following questions so our next one will be better!!

Yes No

1. Was this a convenient time for you?
2. Do you think this was a good idea?
3. What can be done to make this idea better?

_____

_____

_____

4. What can be done to make you feel more comfortable while visiting our school?

_____

_____

_____

Appendix E

Staffings and Annual Reviews

Staffings and Annual Reviews

	Yes	No
1. Was information about this meeting explained in understandable language to you?		
2. Was information about your child explained in understandable language to you?		
3. Did you feel comfortable in the meeting?		
4. Was the meeting held at a time that was okay for you?		
5. Did you really agree with what was suggested?		
6. Did you understand that you could disagree, add, or take away from the suggestions in the meeting?		
7. Would you like to meet more often?		

8. What can be done to make you more comfortable when we meet next time?

Appendix F

Agency Fair

Agency Fair

Answering the following questions will help us plan for future projects such as this. Thanks for taking the time to help us serve you more effectively.

	Yes	No
1. Were you able to speak with someone who you think might be able to help you?		
2. Were the representatives understanding to your needs?		
3. Did the representatives use language that you found easy to understand?		
4. Will you need services that were not available today?		
5. Would you like to attend another event like this one or similar to this one?		